annotated, step 217. The subprocess then returns, step 218.

A third embodiment of the transcription process is illustrated in FIG. 11C. Subprocess 206 commences at step 220 and proceeds to save a reference to the annotated data object in a nursing progress notes index, step 221. This index would be used later to retrieve the annotations. The fan-out to other objects is then performed in step 222 and the process ends, step 223.

Another embodiment of the transcription process is shown in the flow chart of FIG. 11D. Subprocess 206 commences at step 230 and saves the annotated data object to the data base, step 231. The process then returns, step 232. In this embodiment, the process will not establish a separate file for the nursing progress notes. Instead, when the annotations are to be viewed, the system will search the data base for items having annotations and copy the annotations to a temporary file.

Turning now to the process of retrieving the annotations, FIGS. 12A-12C illustrate several different embodiments of the process used by the present invention. Starting with FIG. 12A, a process 300 commences with step 301. A nursing annotation file (data object) containing all of the nursing annotations is then retrieved from the data base, step 302, and displayed, step 310. The process then ends. Process 300 is used in the situation where a nursing annotation file is maintained and updated as annotations are made to the various data objects.

Step 311 of displaying the annotations may be either displaying the nursing progress notes or displaying a scratch sheet of nursing progress notes. If the later is the case, the nurse may then copy the desired notes from the scratch sheet to a permanent file.

In FIG. 12B, process 300′ commences with step 301′. A nursing annotation index is then retrieved, step 303. Annotations are retrieved from data objects referenced in the index, step 304. The annotations are then displayed, step 310′, and the process returns, step 311′.

Again, if the display of step 310′ is a scratch pad, the annotations may be copied into a permanent file.

Another embodiment of the present invention is demonstrated by process 300″ of FIG. 12C. The process commences with step 301″ and then searches the data base for data objects having nursing annotations, step 305. The annotations are then retrieved from the identified data objects, step 306, and the file (or scratch pad) displayed, step 310″. Process 300″ then returns, step 311″.

As described above, a process has been shown which accomplishes the objectives of providing fan-out of annotations. Further, annotations are gathered and consolidated into a single file. In addition, a scratch pad is provided for temporary use in transferring annotations.

Thus, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that there has been provided in accordance with the invention, a method that fully satisfies the objects, aims, and advantages set forth above.

While the invention has been described in conjunction with specific embodiments thereof, it is evident that many alterations, modifications, and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art in light of the foregoing description. Accordingly, it is intended to embrace all such alterations, modifications, and variations in the appended claims.

We claim:

1. A method executed by a computer as directed by a computer program for annotating data in a database, a display being coupled to said computer and displaying a spreadsheet comprising a plurality of data cells, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) selecting a first data to be annotated;

(b) annotating said selected first data by entering a first annotation text into said computer;

(c) storing said first annotation text in said database;

(d) assigning a first notational designator to said first annotation text;

(e) assigning a first notational designator in said first selected data cell to indicate that annotation text is associated with said selected first data cell;

(f) selecting a second data cell to be annotated;

(g) annotating said selected second data cell by entering a second annotation text into said computer;

(h) storing said second annotation text in said database;

(i) comparing said second annotation text with said first annotation text, if said first annotation text is associated with said selected second data cell;

(j) assigning said first notational designator to said second annotation text if said second annotation text is similar to said first annotation text, otherwise assigning a second notational designator to said second annotation text, said second notational designator indicating the existence of said first annotation text; and

(k) displaying said second notational designator in said second data cell to indicate that annotation text is available with said selected second data cell.

2. A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

(e) displaying a plurality of annotations texts on said display;

(f) selecting one of said annotation texts; and

(g) annotating said selected data cell by storing said selected one of said annotation texts in said data base.

3. A method as recited in claim 1, wherein a plurality of forms is associated with one or more of said data cells of said spreadsheet, said forms comprising nursing progress notes, said method further comprising the steps of:

(e) searching said data base for one or more of said forms which are associated with said selected data cell;

(f) storing a reference in said data base to said annotation text associated with said selected data cell to said one or more of said forms; and

(g) displaying said annotation text if said one or more of said forms is selected to be displayed.

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